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Soviets end summertime lull, launch diplomatic attack

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Moscow

Summer vacation is just about over for Soviet diplomacy. This week the Soviet Union:

- Responded tartly to Western charges of heavy Soviet military spending and violations of the 1972 strategic arms agreement.
- Stated formal opposition to West Berlin's inclusion in future Western European parliamentary elections.
- Publicized charges that the CIA tried to subvert a Soviet diplomat in the United States.
- Played host to a high-level Somali military-political delegation.
- Hit out anew at China.

In an article headlined "Who is whipping up the arms race?" Pravda, the Communist Party newspaper, asserted Aug. 4 that Warsaw Pact military spending is less than NATO spending, and that Warsaw Pact military manpower levels are only 8 percent higher than NATO forces.

It again criticized the U.S. for trying to include the light Soviet Backfire bomber in the new arms limitations, while excluding the American cruise missile.

It argued that CIA estimates of Soviet military costs are inaccurate in both dollar equivalents at American prices and percentage of the Soviet gross national product. The two economic systems are so different that neither approach is valid, it asserted.

The Soviet Foreign Ministry statement on West Berlin was delivered to the French, British, and American ambassadors Aug. 3. It was a response to "press reports" that European Community (EC) heads of state and government had decided at Brussels in July to hold direct elections for the European Parliament — with West Berlin voting as part of West Germany. This would be a "gross violation" of the four-power Berlin agreement of 1971, the Soviet statement said.

The spy affair drew a low-key Soviet protest note to the U.S. July 29. But on Aug. 4 the Literary Gazette painted a lurid picture of the alleged incident, one that Western observers termed "nasty" in tone.

According to the weekly, in July two CIA agents tried to induce Second Secretary Oleg Kharchenko of the Soviet UN mission to spy for the U.S. It asserted that when he did not agree (there was no mention of this in the official protest), the agents warned that if he "fell" from the high window of the hotel room they were in, newspapers would report it as a suicide.

Western diplomats here tended to view the Literary Gazette's article as retaliation for numerous reports in Western newspapers about Soviet spying incidents.

The Somali delegation currently visiting Moscow is led by Muhammad Ali Sumartar, who is the country's Vice-President, Defense Minister, and member of the government party's Politburo. No substantive information has been released about the talks. Western diplomats assume from the military nature of the delegation that Soviet military supplies are a prime topic.

According to Western intelligence reports, the Soviet Union has naval, air support, and missile facilities in Somalia.

So far the Soviets have avoided taking sides in the territorial dispute between Somalia and neighboring Ethiopia.

China criticized

The attack on China came in the latest issue of Kommunist. The Soviet Communist Party's theoretical journal scored what it termed Peking's "chauvinist great-power policy" and its attempt to "flatter" developing countries to achieve "world hegemony for China."

Other Soviet press articles this week accused the Chinese leadership of promoting a Mao personality cult, deceiving the party, betraying friends and principles, and trying to discredit the Soviet-bloc economic grouping of Comecon. Monitor correspondent David Much reports from Bonn:

The Soviet Union has sharpened the tone of its comments on West Germany and vice versa. On Aug. 1 Moscow radio criticized Bonn for its plan to propose that the United Nations set up a world court to hear cases of alleged violations of human rights. The radio accused Bonn of "libeling East Germany." The West German proposal arises out of recent shooting incidents on the border between the two Germans.

The combination of border incidents and reports of a Soviet arms buildup in Central Europe and on the seas "makes our politicians nervous and skeptical," a West German official said.

With general elections coming up in October, he added, "it is necessary for the politicians to take a clear stand on East-West questions."